

story goes of an eminent mathematician, he could read through a most animated and splendid epic poem, and on being asked what he thought of it, gravely reply, "What does it prove?" But the want of imagination is never an evidence, and perhaps but rarely a concomitant, of superior understanding.

Imagination may be allowed the ascendancy in early youth; the case should be reversed in mature life; and if it is not, a man may consider his mind either as not the most happily constructed, or as unwisely disciplined. The latter indeed is probably true in every such instance.

LETTER II.

THE ascendancy of imagination operates in various modes; I will endeavour to distinguish those which may justly be called romantic.

The extravagance of imagination in romance has very much consisted in the display of a destiny and course of life totally unlike the common condition of mankind. You may have observed in living individuals, that one of the effects sometimes produced by the predominance of this faculty is, a persuasion in a person's own mind that he is born to some peculiar and extraordinary destiny, while yet there are no extraordinary indications in the person or his circumstances. There was something rational in the early presentiment which some distinguished men have entertained of their future career. When a celebrated general of the present times exclaimed, after performing the common military exercise, as one of a company of juvenile volunteers, "I shall be a commander-in-chief,"* a sagacious observer of the signs of talents yet but partially developed, might have thought it indeed a rather sanguine but probably not a quite absurd anticipation. An elder and intelligent associate of Milton's youth might without much difficulty have believed himself listening to an oracle, when a spirit which was shaping in such gigantic proportions avowed to him a confidence, of being destined to produce a work which should distinguish

* Related of Moreau.